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TEXT prose

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Endgame

I want your legs, stretched long beside mine in the murky light, under the table.

I like the murky light but I'm not sure you've captured the moment on the page.

I want your clean-kind fingers, digging into my thigh – for buried things, as you say.

Let's hear him say it in "realtime". Why are his fingers both clean and kind, and why would you hyphenate it?

Tell me again, say it over again, the thing about honeycomb and stone. That felt true – as if you could see what I wasn't showing you.

It's passable dialogue. I quite like it, really, but I'm not sure you're there, yet.

I wish you'd told me how you felt before you slept with her. Why couldn't you fuck someone else? Don't you see? She played you. Don't be fooled – I blame you, not her. She is a cunt, but she is not in this story.

Maybe she should be in the story. Perhaps she is the missing plot-point. It's not what you want to hear because you'll have to spend time considering her backstory. Abuse, maybe, or an "everyday" women-hating childhood. Is she, *really*, a cunt and, if so, what does that mean, precisely? Don't tell me. Give it to me on the page. Concrete and specific detail – sensory detail. *How* did she play him?

In the end...

What about the beginning? And the middle? We need more possibilities. Bring this back to honeycomb and stone – what *is* that? Don't talk. Write. Let it dissolve on her tongue. Or his... What's going on there? Consider the metaphorical possibilities.

Why did you have to do things the wrong way around? I'm in tailspin, backwards spinning time.

I see what you mean but it's generic, bordering on cliché. Stay in scene... The entry points are all over the shop. It's temporally shifty, which can work but it's not. The beginning is an endgame – too much, too soon. You can't ask the reader to un-know things. Hold something back, for later. Forever...

That hurts...

What? What hurts? Remember Kafka – apparitions rising from the left-hand hole... Let the subject matter take you. *Go there.*

Neck bent awkwardly, wrist counterflexed, fingers gnarled like twigs...

This sounds contortionist – too many body parts. Whose neck? Whose wrist? Whose fingers? Point is – I can't see the bodies *in time*.

His fingers, gnarled like twigs...

Clean-kind, before. Gnarled like twigs, now. *Maybe...* But why? Think associatively. The twigs are more sensory than clean-kind. Where's the connect? Go back. Interrogate the juxtaposition. Make me wonder about the transformation of his hands. Review the progression in narrative time...

I want to be back at the wine bar with you. I want that afternoon in the cobblestoned alleyway. I want you to finish what you started to say, about loving and being in-love. Pull it apart a bit. Pull me...

This could work. It's backwards looking but there's a future in it. It needs tuning but it has promise.

I'm glad you went the wrong way around. I'm glad you banged her before you were bold enough to tell me how you felt. Otherwise I might have fallen. I want fun, not falling. I'm no good at falling. I land too hard. I take longer than other people to GET BACK UP. And why should I fall for your clusterfucking speeches? For dissolving things...

I like the muted reference to the honeycomb. I'm not sure about clusterfucking – I like it and I don't. Overall, something has shifted in her attitude and I'm not sure why and that's interesting. Is it something he has done or failed to do? She's angry, now, and the goodbye is riddled with longing. You may have something...

Julia Prendergast's novel, The Earth Does Not Get Fat was published in 2018 (UWA Publishing: Australia). Julia's short stories feature in the most recent edition of Australian Short Stories (Pascoe Publishing). Other stories have been recognised and published: Lightship Anthology 2 (UK), Glimmer Train (US), TEXT (AU) Séan Ó Faoláin Competition (IE), Review of Australian Fiction, Australian Book Review Elizabeth Jolley Prize, Josephine Ulrick Prize (AU). Julia's research has appeared in various publications including: New Writing (UK), TEXT (AU), Testimony Witness Authority: The Politics and Poetics of Experience (UK). Julia is a Senior lecturer in Writing and Literature at Swinburne University, Melbourne. She is Chair of the Australasian Association of Writing Programs (AAWP), the peak academic body representing the discipline of Creative Writing in Australasia. Julia directed the Australian Short Story Festival, held for the first time in Melbourne, in 2019. She is an enthusiastic supporter of interdisciplinary, open and collaborative research practices.